# Secession: Why I Support A Second Vermont Republic

Contributed by Ian Baldwin
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After he has sworn the oath of allegiance to the Constitution on January 20th, will President Obama begin the process of unraveling the evil and unconstitutional decrees of his predecessor? Will freedom of speech and assembly once again be absolute, protected rights in these still United States? Will that most ancient and hallowed right of the West, habeas corpus, once again be guaranteed to all citizens?

By his deeds shall we know him. And we shall know him soon.

I voted for Mr. Obama. Why would I, a sworn secessionist...? I voted for Barack Obama for many reasons, if not out of political conviction. I am entangled. Entangled by history, by family, by friends, by a sense of justice and honor toward those fellow human beings my Euro-American tribe first enslaved and then segregated as non-equals. Human beings who are finally honored and respected without any equivocation. Set free. For them I am moved -- not for the United States.

For the United States the hour is late, very late.

Any one of you who have African-American friends knows how deep, how absolute and complete Mr. Obama's election to the office of the U.S. presidency is for them, in particular. The meaning of this achievement lies unbounded by words, unshakable in the hearts of our African-American brothers and sisters.

I am a lone secessionist in a large community of family and friends, almost all of whom (not quite all!), starting with my walk-beside, my own wife, do not share this peculiar dream of mine. So, even if the Vermont secessionist movement grows, despite Vermonters' overwhelming vote for Mr. Obama and his promise of change, what about New Mexico or North Carolina or Massachusetts or anywhere else in the multitude of Empire's diverse homelands, where secession still sleeps? I have daughters, sons, granddaughters, every imaginable in-law, a mother, brothers, cousins, and friends who live all over America and for that matter, the world. Thus mindful, if I look at, if I sense the man Obama presents in the media, I see a smile that feels true, eyes that betray more than a hint of unmalicious humor, a face that reflects the joy of being connected to others -- in short, a mensch, not a trickster.

This man inherits the role of Warrior-in-Chief inside the dark belly of The Beast. The very limits of his soul will be tested not only by the powers that surround him but especially by those extra-ordinary executive powers left in his hands, willy-nilly, by the Trickster and his masked allies. My prayer is this gifted man will not sell out those I love and care for, stripping them finally of their Constitutionally guaranteed protections, but whom, in some ineluctable and bittersweet sense, by virtue of my own particular beliefs and convictions, I leave behind.

Because I myself will never return to Empire. Never again will I accept its psychological embrace or be bound to its dreams, the dreams of a narcissistic behemoth.

So, how did I become a secessionist?

It took me decades before the option of secession became a gleam in my arrogant northerner's eye. It happened in two steps, one long and slow, the other short and sudden, like flicking on a light.

Thirty-five years ago, during the OPEC oil crisis, I read two little books that changed how I regarded the world and its possibilities. The Limits to Growth (1972) convinced me to leave my job and work for the new environmental organizations that were doing battle in the federal courts on behalf of the commons that our lives depended on and that economists insisted were mere externalities. Alas, the economists won the argument about growth and thereby doomed the environmental movement. Unknowing, we lived those heady days on the cusp of the Milton Friedmanite-inspired Pinochet-Thatcher-Reaganomic laissez-faire, neo-liberal-statist revolutions that were to consume the world's poor and middle classes and further enrich the miserably few.

The year after Limits was published Fritz Schumacher's Small Is Beautiful came out and I was so impressed I traveled to England to befriend the author. Here was an economist who understood the a priori necessity of metaphysics! Who asked the ultimate questions, questions about meaning, about life's truest significance, its bedrock purpose that had to inform how economics should work in the real world. Human beings were not only material beings but moral and spiritual beings, with moral and spiritual needs that transcended G!-N!-P!

When the Declaration of Independence was penned and signed by our forefathers in 1776, some 18,000 sovereign bodies existed that represented the almost 1 billion human beings then living in the world. A mere two hundred or so years later, with six times as many human beings, that panoply of sovereign bodies had been mostly destroyed and compressed into fewer than 200 nation states -- a mere dozen of which control, directly or indirectly, the lives of every human being on earth.

This trend toward massive centralization is, without a doubt, the most notable thing about human society that has occurred over the past several hundred years. Humankind has left the diversity of the small for the uniformity of the big. The wars fought by the forcibly "unionized" states (for example, France, the USA, Germany, Italy, Soviet Union, Spain, and China) consumed lives as fire consumes dry mounds of kindling. The fatalities of their wars mounted sky high, dwarfing in their sheer destructive scale the violence of all the wars of the mere kingdoms and principalities that had occurred for centuries, if not millennia, beforehand.

Schumacher taught me to think about scale, especially as it related to the potential for the degradation or the elevation of human beings, and to what caused violence and what birthed peace. He set me forth on the path of being a decentralist. And in becoming a decentralist I unwittingly took the first fateful step toward becoming a secessionist.

Reclaiming 'divisibility'

Fast forward 30 years, to 2003. A full two years after Empire had hatched inside the fetid darkness of the Vice President's Energy Task Force meeting its plan for war in Iraq and disaster capitalism for the entire Arab and Muslim world -- a filthy hatchling now grown swollen with corpses. Mute citizens meantime were being gorged into stupefaction on Fox's and CNN's shock-and-awe spectacles and on a multitude of official lies that like piles of spaghetti had no discernible ends or beginnings. A presidential election had been stolen, the theft inscrutably sanctified by the unelected and unaccountable Third Branch. A Nazi-nomenclature-inspired Homeland Security Department had mushroomed overnight into putrid life, eating like acid at the nation's moral foundation.

I was finally forced awake. I could no longer avoid knowing where and who I was, an American citizen whose taxes and personally voted-for representatives were funding the terrors of Gitmo, Abu Ghraib, Baghram, Diego Garcia -- the whole vast and despicable global gulag of extradition, rendition, and death, whose victims, innocent and not, were dumped, dead or half-alive, on the outskirts of the U.S.-led “Free World.”

I became despondent. Enraged. Aha, I thought, I’ll become an ex-patriot. Within days the shade of my living mother fell on me -- my biological mother and my link to the land my ancestors had inhabited for almost four hundred years. Why should I leave? I couldn’t leave. It was my motherland, the soil of my ancestors, the place where my sons and daughters and granddaughters were growing. Then a friend, listening to me grieve and rant, invited me to attend a meeting of secessionists, not more than an hour’s drive north.

Secession. There were people here in Vermont who were meeting to discuss the option of secession? A light went on inside me.

Lincoln’s near-genocidal victory for the indivisible Union of all states into one supreme nation-state eradicated ancient norms and attitudes in all northerners. The once-sacrosanct autonomy of the individual states of these United States, whose capstone was the right of secession, went into a decline from which they have yet to recover. That very right, its very naming, underwent deep etymological tissue surgery and vanished from the living body of discourse by which we weigh our present and future as communities of free human beings. To me, as a northerner, the concept of secession simply didn’t exist. Even as a decentralist adrift in the vast and vaporizing waters of Empire, I could not conceive this option, once venerated by our very own secessionist founding New England fathers and mothers.

Impossible to conceive until, led by my compassionate friend to the secessionists’ meeting, I met a southerner named Thomas Naylor, transplanted to Vermont. Southerners have never forgotten their ancient American birthright. The candle snuffed out inside me was magically, unexpectedly lit during the peak of Vermont’s 2003 mud season.

And so, at last, the economic decentralist arrived home, arm-in-arm with the political secessionist. They were one and the same all along. To be small scale requires small-scale sovereignty, or it is no more than a chimera. A feel-good idea. Those of my many friends and colleagues who “like” the idea of small-is-beautiful, of local “democracy,” and “freedom of choice,” but cannot bring themselves to grapple fatefully with their deep sentiment-laden attachment to the immensity that is “America,” and all the massive violence such an immense state implies and entails, are -- in my eyes -- lost.

It is a strange coincidence that just as the ship of the United States is groaning on the shoals of bankruptcy, leaking dollars like massive jets of seawater, at this precise moment a charismatic black American has arisen out of relative obscurity to become its captain. I can almost see the arrogant smiles of the Trickster and his Masked Troupe of Neo-con armchair warriors and banksters, their pockets stuffed, as they turn over the steerage to Mr. Obama, salute, jump ship, and set sail for the “new” New World Order.

The shores these pirates set sail for will be under the rule of a transnational Triumvirate (some morphed version of the WTO-IMF-World Bank) -- and no longer under the sway of any single hegemonic state, but serving the usual suspects, who will have organized their subjects (humanity) into new multi-nation-state regional alliances, among whom the bankrupted United States will be but one voice. (Bankruptcy does terrible things to the prideful.) Gathered on the darkening plains of those shores will be a legion of neo-Keynesian White Knights, refurbished and arrayed to do battle with the blood-soaked but not yet-vanquished and ever arrogant Black Knights of Neo-liberalism for control of the One True Paradigm, whose priests shall then anoint themselves to “guide” the Triumvirate.

Whoever the winners of this battle will be they will remain committed to the doomed materialist paradigm of growth. They

will be, like their slavish followers, essentially clueless, betting on technology and their near-absolute secular powers (none more vital than their control of the world's monetary policy and its mass media).

Into the Future

We depart for terra incognita. The Triumvirate will not succeed with its newly packaged schemes of capitalist totalitarianism, though it will continue to test its panoply of social-control technologies aimed at we the people. We the people stand, still in thrall to bigness, to the miracle of the Mommy-and-Daddy state, the house built by Lincoln-Wilson-FDR-Reagan, a house whose timbers now creak in a hungry wind.

But though the ever-more centralized global system doesn't yet confront powerful human constraints -- that is, widespread organized opposition -- it does confront non-human constraints now too powerful to control. This is unfortunate for them, but not for us -- should we find the courage to rise to the challenge in front of us. The relentless build-up of several greenhouse gases will continue to unleash massive climate alterations that will raise the cost of global capital's staying in business, as the need for funds for infrastructure repairs, increased insurance costs, ever-expanding military "preparedness," and credit generally all grow, worldwide as well as locally.

World oil production is now, in 2009, projected to begin its long awaited downward slope, at a disconcerting rate of 7 to 9 percent a year. How is it Peak Oil continues to elude mention in our presidential, senate, and congressional debates? Who have we become? And who shall we be when we awaken to reality?

Whatever the terminus of the current worldwide deflationary spiral -- and remember, its depths have yet to be fully tested, as that accountants' nightmare called the global derivatives market is alone estimated to exceed world GDP by a factor of 10 to 20 or more -- the cost of maintaining a Western standard of living is going to inexorably rise on a diminishing base of strategic resources and of eroded, formerly "free" sinks for its pollution.

In the U.S. the Republicrats are presently enmeshed in an orgy of dollar destruction the Triumvirate believes necessary to birth their "new" New World Order. Rest assured the opportunistic consequences of this orgy will be closely examined by the Group of 20 on an ongoing basis, sitting 'round the big table that was initially hosted by the Trickster Bush on November 15, 2008. Whatever, the consequences will not be pretty for any of us, especially if we are not well along our way, in our various communities and mini-states, to launching local currencies, time-share networks, and old-fashioned bartering exchanges.

The Greatest Depression will not be a cushy time: it will be nonetheless an opportune time. It will be a good time, even if a hard time, for secessionists. We have perhaps two to five more years to organize secessionist movements, widespread movements for local self-reliance, throughout the untied states and provinces of Turtle Island. Or let chaos reign.

In cities, neighborhoods, towns, suburbs, rural villages, bioregions everywhere the forces of liberty and innovation and local self-reliance are going to surge, with or without Empire. We must hold our stand on the land, pull down the flag that signals our forlorn allegiance to Empire, and hoist a new flag, founded on a new allegiance -- to liberty and unity in one small place.

For me, Vermont!

This essay first appeared at vtcommons.org. Ian Baldwin is also Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence news

journal's first Publisher Emeritus.

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Further reading:

"Dissolve the U.S.: an Option for Proactive Change before Collapse"

("Will Obama be a Greater Gorbachev?") by Jan Lundberg, Culture Change Letter #221, Dec. 19, 2008:

culturechange.org